

No Complete Work-Saving

FROM A GARDENING
CORRESPONDENT

SEVERAL times recently friends have come to me in some distress—they have lost their gardener, or they cannot afford to hire help any more, or they have just got tired of doing so much work in the garden—and they ask what can be done with a large vegetable garden. They cannot bear to see it covered with weeds, yet they cannot put in the large number of man-hours that a well-kept vegetable garden demands.

They ask me if a motor cultivator would be the answer, but in all honesty I have to point out that a cultivator only does the first job—it eliminates the digging—and apart from hoeing up and down between the rows, it does not contribute any more to the maintenance of the vegetable plot. There is still much work to be done in preparing the seed bed, taking out the drills, sowing the seeds, thinning the seedlings, and, if it is peas or runner beans, staking the plants. Then there is the hoeing to be done between the plants, and the harvesting of the crop, and the removal of it when it is finished.

Sawdust Mulching

The easy answer, of course, is to suggest that the whole area be put down to rough grass, which can be cut a few times a year with a rotary grass cutter, a few flowering shrubs or flowering trees planted in the green sward, some bulbs naturalized in the grass for the spring, and a very pleasant feature will have been added to the garden.

But some of my friends have already got enough rough grass with these features, and are prepared to give a certain amount of time to this erstwhile vegetable patch, but not too much. For them I would suggest a few rows of asparagus, which after all is an easy crop to manage. Then I would suggest filling up the rest of the area with soft fruits, raspberries, gooseberries, red currants, and black currants. Perhaps a row or two of perennial flowers such as paeonies, michaelmas daisies, *Scabiosa caucasica*, and pyrethrums for cutting would also be a possibility. With all these plants one can minimize the upkeep by mulching with peat or sawdust, as I mentioned some weeks ago. Incidentally, many readers have written to ask for further details of sawdust mulching. Here are the answers to their queries.

I think softwood sawdust is to be preferred, but I have known many gardeners who have used softwood and hardwood sawdust without any difficulty. The thickness of the mulch can be as deep as one wishes—I have seen mulches of sawdust put on a foot thick in soft fruit plantations, but I have always found that 2-3 in. would be sufficient to stifle the weeds and keep the moisture in the ground. At, say, 2 in. thickness a ton of sawdust would cover about 140 square yards.

Weed Suppression

The question of applying sulphate of ammonia seems to trouble some readers—I have always scattered the sulphate of ammonia on top of the mulch after we have put the sawdust in position. A handful to the square yard of a mulch 2 in. thick is about right. The optimum application is one cwt. sulphate of ammonia to one ton of sawdust if one is digging it into the soil in a fresh state. However, when it is spread over the ground as a mulch I have always found that it is not necessary to apply so much—1-2 oz. to the square yard has always been sufficient in my own case.

I have used sawdust in my own garden now for seven years—we have used it wherever we want to suppress weeds, among the herbaceous plants, among the roses, soft fruits, over the asparagus, and even among the vegetables. Naturally, if one can obtain the sawdust and has the storage space, it is a good idea to stack it and let it begin to rot a little. It darkens during this process, and looks less unsightly when applied to our beds or borders. But even when put on fresh, it soon takes on a dark colour, especially after the sulphate of ammonia has been applied.

Returning to the first poser, dealing with an embarrassing area of vegetable garden is, by comparison, not an easy problem. So much depends on what time one has to give to it, and what one wishes to get off it.

Gardening.

FROM A GARDENING CORRESPONDENT.

The Times (London, England), Saturday, Feb 25, 1961; pg. 9; Issue 55015. (745 words)

Category: Arts and Entertainment

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS152264793